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AUTHOR Cassara, Beverly Benner
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ABSTRACT

International adult education can be defined as training and development of insights and values for the purpose of professional action. The frame of reference for international adult education is international understanding. Adult educators can help their students understand why they need to become literate as they examine literacy efforts in other countries and the reasons why literacy matters in various cultures. They can help adults to know themselves and the world so that they may play a responsible part. Courses in international adult education include a review and discussion of the various philosophies of adult education, the history of adult education internationally beginning with the Folk High Schools of Denmark, contributions of individual adult educators like Roby Kidd and George Aker, human geography, and educational practices of various countries. Career opportunities for international adult education graduates include training positions with the World Bank, the United Nations, the Red Cross, and other international organizations; grant writing positions with nonprofit organizations; evaluation positions with philanthropic organizations; development jobs in developing nations; and study group leadership in the United States. Adult educators can fill a great many roles while collaborating with others around the world and helping to promote a peaceful global community. (KC)

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EMBRACING THE OBVIOUS: ADULT EDUCATION GOES INTERNATIONAL

Welcoming Address
International Adult Education Institute
University of Southern Maine
Gorham, Maine
June 17, 1990

by

Dr. Beverly Benner Cassara
Adjunct Professor of Adult Education
University of Southern Maine

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I wish to begin my remarks this evening by congratulating the University of Southern Maine for the leadership position it is taking in bringing "global thinking" to the adult education movement. I would like to talk about international adult education as a field of study and practice. Quite a number of colleges and universities are now concerned with internationalizing the curriculum for undergraduate and graduate programs. A relatively new professional organization has been created, The Association of International Education Administrators, for the purpose of enhancing this development. Any number of higher education organizations have developed special commissions, staffed by outstanding educational leaders in our country for the purpose of finding ways to provide American students with a realistic understanding of the today's world. However, it becomes obvious from their reports that the American student they are considering is a young person. Very few of such reports address adult education specifically. Therefore, we, the adult educators, and the adult education movement generally must take up the challenge of helping persons outside the traditional college and university years to see themselves as actors on the international stage. It certainly is no overstatement to say that we cannot wait for today's children to grow up to be the saviors of the future. We are creating their future right now, for better or for worse, by the decisions we make, and more and more, these decisions affect the lives of people in many countries.

In the middle 70's, I made a small survey of the one hundred or so adult education graduate programs in the United States and

Canada to ascertain to what extent internationalism had been built into the curriculum. There was very little. Perhaps half a dozen programs had courses in comparative adult education, and a few more had some international content in other courses, like Foundations. This, even though, and even at that time, a good number of our leading adult educators were involved themselves in international consulting. I repeated the survey in the mid 80's and although the picture had improved considerably, international courses were not sweeping the adult education programs. But it is important to note that the courses in even comparative adult education are not the same as international adult education as it is coming into focus today.

Comparative adult education is knowledge for the sake of knowledge, if I may put it that simply. It is an academic exercise for the purpose of developing understanding, to be sure, but not necessarily for the purpose of action as well.

International adult education, on the other hand, is training and the development of insights and values for the purpose of professional action. That action may take very many different forms, and I will spell out some of these, but first let me say that the international adult educator makes international understanding the broad parameter, the frame of reference for all one's professional work. For instance, if we are teaching literacy classes in Washington, D.C. or Portland, Maine, we can derive professional satisfaction in our work and motivation in our students by sharing with them the literacy needs in other countries, and the reasons why they exist, and why

it matters! Then our students are learning more than how to read bus signs. If we know the various philosophies of literacy training, and they are several, we can understand our own practice and gear it to the best principles. If we know the various methods used in other places, we can adapt good ideas to our situation. The international adult educator lives very consciously in the world, and not only in his or her own city or country.

We think of the purpose of adult education as an effort to enhance the quality of life and certainly not just for ourselves but globally. To enhance the quality of life--that is a wonderful phrase but what does it mean? To me it means helping adults to know themselves and the world we live in so that they may play a responsible part. This is equally needful for persons in all countries, including our own. For the actions of people in every country in our global village interface with each other in every aspect of life.

In this regard, environmental concerns leap to our attention. Acid rain, like the birds of the air, knows no international boundaries. The ultra-violet rays of the sun, shining through the ozone layer, have no particular preference for nationalities. Fish from the polluted seas in many areas of the world are not safe to eat. All the ecological problems cry out for research and education by today's adults. Tomorrow can be too late.

Understanding the individual's responsibility in international political concerns may not be easy. However, our thoughts and actions do count. For example, racism is a

universal tragedy. Every individual plays a part, for better or for worse. Refugees, legal and illegal, are streaming into many countries, including our own. What is the answer? We have to take this problem more seriously than we even have to date, because movement across borders is the wave of the future. There is no little white picket fence to secure our peace and prosperity. New models for international understanding and cooperation are needed.

It seems that just now in these days, great attention is being focused on the economic strength of the United States as it relates to the international scene. As a matter-of-fact this is the most common reason given by the educational experts for the need for internationalizing the campus, because as the economic future becomes more dependent on the global marketplace, and the international trading environment becomes more fiercely competitive, we need a new generation of business experts with all kinds of international skills. There is no doubt that such experts are needed, but they can and had better be the adults of today as well as the graduates of tomorrow.

For me, the most important reasons for adult education to enter the international arena are the humanistic and social concerns. We need to be more intimately acquainted with the unfortunate ways that the health and safety and human rights needs of our fellow humans all over the world are played out in their daily lives. After all, wars and economic strife and ecological degradation grow out of excessive nationalism and lack of understanding and concern for the individual who is not us.

Carlos Fuentes, the well-known Mexican writer said, "What the U.S. does best is to understand itself. What it does worst is to understand others." I would submit that this might be true of other countries as well. Well, then, if we can agree that adult education has a role to play in these literally earth-shaking matters, then we need to take a look at international adult education as a field of study and practice, for as a field of study, international adult education is more than comparative adult education and as a field of practice it is more than literacy training. International adult education crosses the boundary lines of many professions. What it brings to these professions is a knowledge of the philosophies of how and why adults learn and the most applicable methods to be used in any case, and most importantly a commitment to the empowerment of the people themselves. The first question students ask, is what possibilities international adult education leads to career-wise.

Career-wise, there are endless possibilities for the international adult educator--part-time and full-time, at home or abroad, paid and volunteer, and in any combination of these. What is required, however, is the ability to creatively search out opportunities, for they will seldom be labeled as "adult education." For instance, the World Bank usually builds into any loan project, training for the folks who will be implementing a project and carrying it on after the experts are gone. They do not usually call this adult education, but it is and it is funded. If you ask many World Bank officials about the budget for adult education at the Bank, they will say that it is very small, that there is just one little adult education office, or

something like that. For the work labeled "adult education" is not extensive, but the work labeled "training" is budgeted for millions of dollars.

This situation is equally true in multinational corporations, voluntary organizations like the Red Cross, and even in much of the work of the United Nations. The work of all these groups is heavily laced with adult education, even though under a different name. Probably the most popular label today is "human resource development." Take the United Nations, for instance. UNESCO does, indeed, have many adult education programs which are clearly labeled as such, and specifically budgeted. However, almost every other U.N. activity has adult education programs without the label. If you think of the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNICEF--what are their purposes? Research and relevant action which is carried out through adult education programs.

Let's take a look at my own career for a moment, for I consider myself to be an international adult educator. In my own graduate program at Boston University in the 60's, I had no formal course in international adult education. My serious endeavors in this area began with my Fulbright to Berlin, West Germany. I found that experience so significant, I came back to my university with a determination to open international doors and understanding for my students. To that end, I began teaching a course in international adult education each semester, I organized several yearly national conferences on international themes, I organized graduate student tours to East Africa and

was fortunate enough to receive a USIA Faculty Exchange grant with the University of Nairobi's College of Adult Education through which seven members of each institution had the opportunity to visit and teach in the sister institution. In the course of that three-year activity many spin-off projects emerged. I published articles and I am especially proud of a fifty-page section which I got published in Howard University's Journal of Negro Education which was written by five women in Kenya who had graduated from the adult education diploma program there and who were involved in various adult education careers, from the army to the church. I organized a committee to support one of their professors to come to this country to do his doctorate. These are only some of the activities related to that period.

Currently, I have established a cooperative program with the Peace Corps, through which a student spends one year at our adult education program at UDC and then spends two years in the Peace Corps in an adult education activity. That person may complete up to nine credits in research and independent study while in the Peace Corps. At the end of the period, he/she has a Master's degree, two years of wonderful professional experience abroad, the opportunity to be employed one time by the government by appointment without competition for a job, and \$5000 for settling in when returning to the U.S. I am pleased to say that as of last week, I had received a grant for full tuition funding for two of our Peace Corps Fellows. This is a comparatively new program in the Peace Corps--one that USM could participate in as well if there was interest. There are other Peace Corps

initiatives associated with graduate programs which you might want to explore. My work has included all the aspects mentioned above. Of course, my work at the University was a full-time salaried position, as was a semester I taught at the University of Siegen in West Germany. Otherwise, it has been part-time and voluntary, both in this country and abroad. My volunteer work has been extensive. I have written, edited, chaired the AAACE International unit, chaired the International Associates of the Coalition for Adult Education Organizations, been a member of the Program Advisory Committee of the International Council for Adult Education, and now I am a member of the Executive Committee of that body. In my case, it is clear that my experience has been wholly related to my role as a professor.

I am sure that each of you can think of some kinds of adult education careers which are totally different. Take non-profit consulting outfits, like the AED (Academy for Educational Development). They have several persons on their staff who do little else than write proposals to be submitted to USAID, the World Bank and all kinds of private donors to support training and education in Third World countries. To carry out the work, when a project is funded, they depend on consultants, who may be professors or free-lance consultants. Within this organization then, there are several kinds of adult education tasks which begin with the development of a knowledge of where the money is, the writing of proposals, all the way to carrying out the work of a special training project in another country.

Take another example, a friend of mine at the World Bank has the responsibility to travel to different countries to assess the economic value of the various training programs to that country.

Then, if you think of the vast array of donor organizations and the growing industry of grantsmanship and philanthropy, you will find many other kinds of work from research to the development of specialized libraries, to accounting, assessing and evaluating--all jobs that relate to the field of adult education. I must admit, I sometimes resent this growing bureaucracy in the funding organizations which seems to have such a good time feeding on itself. While the officials are jet-setting all over the world, deciding how they wish to spend their money, the poor applicant can wait for months to hear whether there is any hope for his/her program, if indeed an answer ever comes. This may be a bit of a harsh criticism, but, whether it is or not, the fact remains that there are many adult education opportunities within these organizations and there is need for knowledgeable, humanistic and committed adult educators.

This is becoming more true everyday as the previous roles of donor organizations are being called into question by recipients in many Third World countries who are becoming more sophisticated about their own best interests. For instance, delegates to an international conference on popular participation in the recovery and development process in Africa, held in Arusha, Tanzania several months ago, were strongly critical of their own governments and the NGO's from the North because they regarded themselves as benefactors rather than partners trying to build real solidarity with African NGO's.

Recolonization of Africa was the term used to describe the austerity policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank and the way these measures are applied by the African elite in the governments. It is becoming unacceptable to Third World countries that the paths to their development should be dictated by outside interests. Adult educators have been instrumental in bringing this problem to the light. Believing in the principle of participation, they have been playing the facilitator role.

Just to name a few other kinds of international adult education work, we could mention study groups in the U.S. such as "The Great Decisions," "The National Issues Forum," The Society for International Development, and the World Affairs Councils. All the organizations I have mentioned provide opportunities, --full-time, part-time, paid or volunteer for the person interested in international adult education.

What remains to be discussed is the content of courses in international adult education. What do students learn? I can only speak from my own experience since there is no specific and accepted curriculum.

I believe that an important first step is a review and discussion of the various philosophies of adult education so that the student will be consciously aware of his/her own motivations and beliefs, and understand well the value system he or she may be implementing in any situation. We must be very wary of authoritarian, noblesse-oblige type motivations.

Beyond that, there is much to study--too much for one semester really. The history of adult education internationally

goes back at least to Socrates, but I start the students out with Bishop Grundtvig in Denmark and the Folk High Schools, showing how these influenced the delivery system of adult education in much of Europe and not too much in America or Third World countries and why. Nevertheless; it is important to show how individuals, such as the Fathers at St. Frances Xavier University in Nova Scotia, and later, Miles Horton in the American south were heavily influenced by the Folk High School Movement. Other significant national cases are cited to show how philosophies and methods do cross national boundaries and why some do not. In the case of Third World Countries, our study usually starts with the time of their independence.

One important way to get an understanding of international adult education is to study the lives and work of international adult educators of our day. Of course, Dr. Roby Kidd of Canada was "Mr. International Adult Educator" if there ever was one. Unfortunately he died in 1982 before we could afford to lose him. He traveled all over the world and wherever he went there would immediately spring up a network of interested adult educators sharing and learning from each other between and among countries. I would also like to mention another great internationalist who also has left us long before we could spare him, and he is George Aker from Florida. George was, like Roby, a very unassuming man. His interests were always in helping others, setting up networks between his university and especially countries in Latin America, but also in the Far East. We needed him particularly because he opened adult education doors to the south where, we in the United States should be ashamed to admit, we have not done nearly

enough. An automobile accident took his life a couple years ago while he was on a consulting trip in Panama. However, again like Roby, his work will continue because he did not work alone, but engaged and trained many persons in the course of his work who will carry on his mission and goals. Let me tell you a beautiful story in this regard. When I was in Thailand in January at the World Adult Education conference, I met a young woman who was our guide on a tour of adult education facilities in the northern part of the country. During her briefing, which reminded me so much of the best adult education theory and practice in our country, it suddenly occurred to me that George Aker had worked in Thailand at one point in his career, and sure enough, she had been a doctoral student with him in Florida. I was so warmed and pleased to know that George's wonderful influence lives on.

In introducing current personalities in international adult education work, I try to give credit where credit is due, even if particular persons are not readily recognized. For instance, such names as Paulo Freire, Malcolm Knowles, Alan Knox, John Lowe, Peter Jarvis, just to name a few, are known because they have published. Others, and many women among them, have not published and therefore, are difficult to study, but their work is equally significant. These would include Helen Kekkenon in Finland, Dame Nita Barrow of Barbadoes, Arvonne Fraser of the U.S. and any number of others. To understand the philosophy and the practical contributions of these persons is very important for the student.

International adult education students come to this course,

like most adults, badly in need of a refresher course in geography and especially human geography, to help them understand the various regions of the world and the influences that have shaped them and are still doing so. For instance, how many people can name the fifty-four or so countries in Africa, or know their relations to each other or their former colonial powers? Even though only limited time can be devoted to this concern, it is important for the international adult education student, and I might say that most students find it endlessly fascinating.

I would like to mention the work of the International Council for Adult Education, located in Toronto. It is not surprising that much of their work is concerned with Third World countries, since that is where the greatest need is. However, many of their priority concerns reflect needs of industrialized countries as well, especially subjects like Peace Education, The Women's Network, Criminal Justice, The Environment, but even subjects like Primary Health Care which is developing in Third World countries, is not alien to the needs of urban and rural populations in parts of some industrialized countries, including our own. In this course, students learn about all the adult education concerns related to the subjects I have just mentioned plus several others, including literacy, participatory research, use and effects of new technology and workers' education.

We could now just make reference to the adult education influences shared with us from the specific countries mentioned in this conference brochure. Beginning with Brazil, that country has given us the world's most famous current international adult

educator, Paulo Freire, even if his own country did not always appreciate him. From Canada we have already mentioned Roby Kidd and the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia, as two examples. The history of adult education in China has gone through many phases in this century, about which Nat Colletta, with a team of adult educators, has published a very interesting report for the World Bank. The influences from Great Britain have become so intermixed with our own that it is hard to separate them, but their Open University, established in the 60's has influenced adult education all over the world. Everyone wants to know Japan's educational secret that speaks to their economic success. One answer surely lies in the fact of their homogenous culture and its accepted value system, which suggests one further important aspect of the study of international adult education. Adult educators and internationalists in every field need to understand that there are programs and practices in many countries which are unique to that country and which will not travel across boundaries, and are not susceptible to foreign influence.

In closing, let me suggest that the greatest adult educators are those with a well-developed sense of humility and a great willingness to learn, for the field is vast and changing rapidly. It is a fascinating field. Collaborating across borders with colleagues--north, south, east and west--contributes, in however small a way, to the ideal of a peaceful global community for which we all yearn.